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ABSTRACT

A program designed to provide students with a fairly good command of English, including some knowledge of scientific and technical English, upon completing the five year middle school is discussed. The five year period is divided into three stages. In the first stage, first and second year students receive training in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing with special emphasis on the former two skills. Listening and speaking training should not be undertaken without subsequent training in reading and writing for the acquisition and development of these skills is interdependent. The second stage concerns individual study and independent work by third year students. Individual study provides basic training and is compulsory for the development of reading skills. The development of skills during independent work improves the effectiveness of classroom teaching. The third stage, undertaken in the fourth and fifth years, provides special training in reading while continuing training in other skills. To train students to read and comprehend scientific English, a series of lessons on electricity was assigned. Students were to read the texts silently and aloud, describe selected passages, memorize technical items, and grammatically analyze sentences. Progress in the development of all four skills is noted. (JK)

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EDUCATIONAL REFORM
in
CHINA'S MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH

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In order to improve the teaching of English in middle schools, we experimented on teaching English at the Second Middle School affiliated to the Huadong Teachers University, where the students have altogether 'five years' schooling. Our idea was to enable the students, in the course of five years' study, to have an elementary knowledge and a fairly good command of the English language and some knowledge of scientific and technological English as well. We divided the five year period into three stages, each stage having its own importance. During the first stage the students of the first and second year grades were given an all-round training in listening (or understanding), speaking, reading and writing, with special emphasis on listening and speaking, that is audio-lingual practice. In the second stage the third year grade students were continued to be given an all-round training in listening, speaking, reading and writing, laying main emphasis on their individual study and their ability to work independently. In the third and the final stage, the students of the fourth and fifth year grades were given special training in reading skill, paying attention to their training in the other three skills at the same time.

We feel happy over some definite achievement made in the course of our four years' practice. The students learnt more than 3000 words, making fairly good progress in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Their grammatical knowledge exceeded the range as fixed by the Ministry of Education in its review for those wishing to sit for the enrollment examination for higher institutions of learning throughout the country in 1978. The students could describe a picture both orally and in written form, after 15 minutes' preparation. Those making good progress could speak English with fewer errors, using 30 sentences within 3 minutes, making up about 270 words. In writing practice they could do even better. Most of the students could write an essay or an article in 30 to 40 minutes. They could also read and understand books on elementary science, using dictionaries. Three main issues will be discussed:

1. Listening and Speaking followed by Reading and Writing

Our important method of training students in listening and speaking was to make use of real objects, gestures or movements, picture cards, lantern slides and tape recorders to create real situations for pattern practice, questioning and answering, dialogues, oral descriptions and even performances.

Every time an experiment was to begin, we started with a performance to be given by the students as a break-through to acquire the listening and speaking ability. With the subject matter already taught and with the basic knowledge of the language imparted to the students, we compiled the two programmes, "The Foreign Friends are Visiting our School" and "Learn from Pan Tung-tzu" for the students to perform. Later these very programmes

were used as teaching materials. The bulk of the two teaching materials mentioned above was found to be greater than that of a book compiled for the same grade by the Textbook Compiling Group for the primary and middle schools in Shanghai. By using the method of listening and speaking, real objects and situations for questions and answers, and situational dialogues, we introduced new words and expressions and sentence patterns. Old patterns with which the students were already quite familiar, were also used to introduce new words. This was done to remove thedifficulties of the students and bring out the new words and expressions more prominently, so that the students could learn the new words and expressions well by using the old sentence patterns extensively. New sentence patterns were then properly introduced by using the old vocabulary (words and expressions the students already learnt). This was done mainly for giving special significance to the different patterns, usages and structures of the sentences dealt with. The students were organized to do the drills in sentence patterns, using the words classified under different subject matters, to train themselves in quick questioning and answering. Then followed their picture talks, that is, giving oral descriptions of the pictures shown in lantern slides. The students talked about a passage as soon as they had learnt it. They did so, first in small groups, then in large groups. Thus everybody had the chance to take part in such activities till the whole text was covered.

The method of using picture books and lantern slides with the simultaneous description of the pictures played by the tape recorder seemed vivid and lively. It could arouse the students' interest in the language and greatly help them in understanding and learning it well. We also adopted the method of picture talk -- questioning and answering about a picture and oral description of the picture to train the students in the use of the language. When describing a picture orally, the students were kept within bounds -- they were made to

centre their description upon the real contents of the picture. Also, using the readily available picture books, a picture card show (both in English and Chinese) was held, adding English captions to the pictures taken from Chinese picture books. We found such picture card show simple and easy to arrange. They presented a suitable place and situation for language practice and created the right atmosphere for training in a foreign language, and this technique formed an effective measure to develop the students practical ability in learning a foreign language. Once we held a picture card show which told about the outstanding work of a middle school student who went to take part in the reconstruction at a certain border region; the students wrote the English captions for the pictures and acted as narrators in turns. All this was done by the students themselves, and the result was found to be quite satisfactory. It could be still more satisfactory if the pictures for the lantern slides with the tape-recorded description were used, since the students had learnt them before.

To be more systematic, we found that it was necessary to group the lessons according to the units of the subject matters. We found it suitable for each term to have one to two units, with five to ten lessons in a unit. It was found necessary that there should be a certain link between the contents of the subject matters of the two terms close together and that the details should be consistent. By bringing the subject matter, its content, vocabulary and grammar together in a more concentrated form, we found it helpful for training the students to take part in questioning and answering in a more thorough-going way on the subject matter. And it was also helpful to the teachers to train the students to hold dialogues and give oral descriptions about the text.

Only giving precedence to listening and speaking without any subsequent training in reading and writing could not

develop the students ability to read and write and it was, in turn, found to be of no help in the improvement of the students ability to listen and to speak. A student's ability to write a short article based on his oral description of a lantern slide (his picture talk) was in itself an effective method of transforming his listening and speaking ability into his ability to read and to write. We found it beneficial for the students to write a passage about a lesson as soon as they finished learning it, and a whole article as soon as they covered unit.

2. Training a student for His Ability in Individual Study

Individual study is the basic training and a compulsory course for a student to train himself in developing his reading skill.

The requirements for individual study were as follows:

To fully understand the contents of a reading material with the help of a dictionary, the list of vocabulary, notes and grammatical explanations given therein. To be able to read aloud the new words and expressions and the text with correct pronunciation and intonation according to the phonetic symbols. And, to be able to give correct answers to the questions on the text put by the teachers.

In training the students for individual study, the selection of reading materials should be gradual and be simpler to more difficult ones. There should not be an excessive number of new words and too much grammar in them. We selected the textbooks compiled by the compiling group of Shanghai primary and middle schools (1973 edition) for reading material. We started from lesson One of Book Five. One to two periods a week, on any day that the students had their English lessons, were fixed for the reading lesson. The students were required to read one or two texts in one period, and finish reading ten books in one year.

The development of the students individual reading skill

greatly improved the classroom teaching. According to usual experience, a whole lesson took five to six periods. But now it takes only three periods. The other two to three periods can thus be used to read books on scientific English in the original, such as elementary physics, chemistry and mathematics.

3. Reading Scientific English

To enable the students to read books in the original, expecially the books on scientific English, after their graduation, it is necessary that they should now begin reading some scientific English.

The question is "What sort of scientific English should they read?" We knew that "ELECTRICITY" is like the lifeblood widely used by peoples in all walks of life. So we chose "ELECTRICITY" as the subject for our students to read scientific English for a breakthrough. We selected ten lessons on the most elementary knowledge of electricity from the science books in English as reading texts. Each text was double in contents compared with any ordinary text of English language taught in middle schools. As soon as the students finished reading a text, they were required to memorize a certain number of technical terms, to analyse the sentences grammatically, to read aloud the texts and to describe certain passages of the text.

The teaching method was as follows:

For the first period the students were required to read and understand the text using "A Handbook of Common Vocabulary about Electronics and Electricity", compiled by the Foreign Language Department of Tsinghua University and published by the Commercial Press.

In the second period the whole class was required to either discuss or translate the text orally and analyse the sentences grammatically so as to have a further understanding of the text, and to read aloud the text, correctly and fluently.

In the third and the fourth periods the students were required to do questioning and answering, translation of the text into Chinese and explanation both orally and in written form.

Now the question is "On what foundation should the students begin to read scientific English?" A special characteristic of the sentences in scientific English is that they are mostly in passive voice and there are so many attributive and adverbial clauses. Through our experimentation we came to understand that the proper time for the middle school students to begin reading scientific English was after they had a vocabulary of around 1500 words, an elementary knowledge of grammar (including the seven tenses, passive voice and complex sentences such as those with attributive and adverbial clauses) and the ability to read ten textbooks individually -- all this acquired within the first three years of their schooling. In fact, the middle school students could gradually come across certain terms and expressions of scientific English even during the first three years of their schooling. In the year 1976 over 50 middle schools in the Phuto district of Shanghai held an examination in English for the middle school graduates of 1977. Five to ten top students from each school were selected to sit for the examination. Ten students from our experimental class (who were actually to graduate in 1978, and, therefore, a year junior to the examinees from the other middle schools) were selected to sit for the examination. In the question paper there was an article in scientific English entitled "Raindrop" which the students were required to translate from English into Chinese. The article described the whole process of water vapour changing into raindrops and again returning back to the ocean, thus going on like that in cyclic order. The students from our experimental class did the translation fairly well. The result of the examination was that in the whole district only ten passed the examination, and of the ten, eight were from our experimental class. One of the students from our class who passed the examination got 90 marks, being the highest in the whole district, and three students from our class got over 80 marks each.

From the experimentation described above, we can see that it is entirely possible for a middle school student to learn English well including the scientific language by the time he leaves school.

In 1978 and in autumn this year we carried out our second and third rounds of experimentation with all the four classes of the first year grade. Our plan for the (educational) reform of the 6-year middle school education was that the students should attain the level of senior middle school in their knowledge of English as promulgated by the Ministry of Education in its syllabus for the whole country. By the time the students finish their schooling, or after 6 years of schooling, they should acquire a vocabulary of around 4000 words and have an elementary knowledge of English grammar. That is, the students should have a fairly good command of English as a foreign language when they come out of the middle schools; besides, they should also be able to read basic scientific English.

In the mid-term examination in July this year, our students sat for the university enrollment examination. The result was that the four classes which sat for the examination in written English, scored an average mark of 65, which reached the standard of an senior middle school graduate. This proved that it is quite possible for a middle school student to acquire a good knowledge and a fairly good command of a foreign language such as English by the time he finishes his schooling.